

## **Archive for January, 2010**

### **Habitat Needs For Wildlife**

Saturday, January 9th, 2010

From now until about the end of March, is a critical time for wildlife in the great outdoors. Missouri, and much of the midwest, is in the midst of a deep freeze, with below zero overnight temperatures, and heavy snow cover in some vicinities. Longer term predictions indicate that several more spells of such weather will occur until spring breaks the pattern. The current freeze is going on two weeks as I write this. Most native wildlife can survive such conditions quite well as long as their basic needs are met within their range of activity. The main needs are as follows:

1. Heavy resting cover to protect them from the elements and predators, while allowing them to preserve energy.
2. A readily available food source that doesn't require undue energy to access.
3. A source of water that they can utilize.

These needs are necessary, whether we are talking about wildlife in rural areas, or around the homeplace in an urban setting. Therefore, if helping wildlife is one of your objectives, now is a good time to get outside (if you can stand it) and assess the quality of the habitat your tract or plot can provide to meet the basic needs outlined above. The dead of winter (now!) is the time when our wild friends need the most help we can provide.

Is that brushpile at the back of your lot really thick and strong enough to provide the protection those lovable rabbits need? Do the squirrels have enough things to eat when they emerge from their comfy dens looking for a meal? How about the birds? If you feed them, make sure their food is not "frozen in," and that they can get some water somewhere nearby. Animals can get dehydrated too. If you begin supplemental feeding of any kind of wildlife, don't stop it in the midst of a bad spell of weather just because you get tired of doing it. Once the critters learn to depend on it, you're obligated to them. If you can't stay with it, it is best to not start at all.

Helping wildlife during trying times can be a satisfying enterprise, and it can be accomplished quite well if you remember the basic needs and try to supply them in the best quantity and quality you can, depending on your individual circumstances. Once spring is sprung, you'll be rewarded by seeing your feathered and furry friends going about their business, and providing the antics you've come to enjoy whether looking out the kitchen window or out over the back forty.

Remember : food, cover, and water. These are the basic needs of all wildlife. Sounds like something we humans need too.

### **Planting Cultivars**

Friday, January 15th, 2010

As the spring planting season approaches, you may have started, or soon will, searching for trees to plant around your home. Hopefully, you will have a general idea of what kind of tree you want in order to accomplish some objective you have in mind. For example, you may have decided to plant a tree with more brilliant fall colors than the one(s) that is (are) already present around the place. Or, you might be looking for something that will fit in a narrow space that will screen you from a busy street, but which

will not spread too much laterally. There are other examples, but what you are looking for is a tree that will “perform” in a predictable manner to accomplish an objective. What you are looking for is probably a “cultivar.”

A cultivar is simply a variety of a particular tree species that has been selected for a distinctive feature such as flower color, fruit, growth form, leaf color, or disease resistance. Once an individual variety has been selected, it is then *cultivated* to maintain that feature through the generations of its offspring, so they too perform in a predictable way. In general, cultivars are perpetuated primarily through asexual reproduction (no cross pollinating!) so that the genetic characteristics that result in the varietal difference(s) are passed along to the offspring. Thus, if you want a red maple with extra red leaf color, you can achieve this objective by planting the cultivar called ‘Autumn Flame’ red maple, with the assurance that a brighter red colored leaf will result because the genetic makeup of the selected parent is unchanged and has been passed on to the individual plant you are putting in your landscape.

Some native and non-native species alike have cultivars. In general, you should look for cultivars of a native species first, since they will usually perform better than non-natives. This is no different than what I recommend for general planting; i.e. always try to use a native species whenever possible, because they normally do better and have less problems than a non-native species, as they develop.

However, there are situations where a non-native species may be your best choice, particularly in an urban situation where concrete and asphalt, buildings and bridges, and people and cars have so changed the “ecosystem” that “native” conditions no longer exist. Having something green in such conditions is better than having nothing to soften the harshness of such highly developed areas.

There are many sources of information about species selection, including cultivars. This Council has regional lists of recommended trees for urban plantings. The Missouri Department of Conservation has a number of publications that can help, as well as foresters who can provide recommendations for your specific area. Local extension offices, consulting foresters, and arborists can help. Nurseries and garden centers can also provide specific information on the cultivars they handle. However, in order to provide the proper recommendation for you, any of these sources must have a good idea of what you want the tree to do — i.e. How do you want it to *perform*? Once they know this, species selection can become a lot less complicated, and it might even mean that a cultivar might be in your future.

### **Storm Damage Reminder**

Sunday, January 31st, 2010

When storms damage trees, cleanup and recovery can be overwhelming. Some injured trees can be treated and repaired to maintain their health and value to your home. Others should be removed. There are many sources of information out there that deal with storm damaged trees, plus you can also get onsite advice from professional arborists and foresters who provide services for a fee. Outlined below are some reminders regarding the first steps that are needed to deal with damaged trees around the home.

1. Safety first – Survey the situation and decide what you can safely deal with. Under no circumstance should the average homeowner try to remove limbs, branches, etc. that are entangled with downed electrical lines. These should be reported to the local electric utility, so they can remove them. Once electric line danger is precluded, limbs, branches, etc. that have fallen on your house should be removed, as well as the debris that is blocking access to your home. Once the immediate safety risks are removed, take your time to assess the damage and decide what to do next.

2. Contact your insurance carrier – Many homeowner policies cover part of the cost of cleaning up damage to your home.

3. Be patient. If a tree doesn't present any more immediate hazard, take time to figure out how best to care for the tree(s). Get professional help, if need be. Don't take on more than your skill level allows. Do not hire just anyone who shows up at your door wanting to "fix" your trees. These "storm chasing opportunists" may do more damage to your trees than the original storm. It's best to go with a certified arborist.

4. Don't allow your trees to be topped. Such drastic action does not reduce the chances of the tree being damaged in future storms. In fact, topped trees are more likely to be damaged by future events than are properly pruned trees.

5. Removal – some trees simply cannot recover from storm damage and should be removed. In general, a tree that loses 50% or more of its crown should be removed. A tree that has its trunk split should also be removed. Trees that are root sprung (i.e. tipped but not completely fallen over) usually need to be removed. Expert advice should be sought if you suspect a tree should be removed, but are not sure.

6. Again, once the immediate dangers are safely taken care of, you can take your time to determine the next tree care steps that will be needed to restore your trees and home landscape to a healthy and valuable condition.

**EVERYTHING DOESN'T HAVE TO BE FIXED BY TOMORROW! DON'T TRY TO RUSH THE RECOVERY.**